

# **An Educational Approach**

## **A Classroom Model to Carry the Message**

The single session outlined in this document can be duplicated as presented or can be adopted to different approaches to Recovery as a one-time workshop, weekly class (for a set number of sessions), or as part of an ongoing educational process.

This class is not affiliated with, not approved by, and not required by Alcoholics Anonymous, the Twelve Step Program, Alcoholics Anonymous World Service Organization, or any other service board or body of that fellowship. It is a method for individual members of the Fellowship to carry the message to newcomers or to returnees who are beginners again.

This class is not affiliated with, not approved by, and not required by the Healing Place of Wake County or Recovery Dynamics, but works in cooperation with those organizations.

This is a personalized approach to introducing newcomers to AA, the Steps, the Tools, the Big Book, and the Principles of the Twelve Step program, which are now represented by over 180 Twelve Step programs registered with AA WSO.

The focus is on Recovery and how the newcomer can reproduce the results now enjoyed by several million individuals in over 80 countries around the world.

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## **Components and Resources**

The class outlined in this guide can be structured a number of ways:

It can be:

- a) a one time, workshop structure conducted by a panel with time and experience in the 12-Step Program;
- b) an on-going class where people agree to show up for a certain number of meetings (one session workshop, four week classes, a semester, etc.);
- c) an introductory class for newcomers who may be in a detox, treatment facility, or otherwise assembled as a group.

The structure is seen as educational and not a replacement for doing the work of a 12-Step Program.

When viewed as a teaching vehicle, the focus shifts from traditional sponsor model to one of engagement.

## Engagement

The key to successful teaching is engagement – to get the participants of the class, or at least some of them, interacting, sharing questions about the Program, the History, the Steps, the Tools, or details of any of this set of topics.

The session leader or leaders then take this dialog to focus on the topics being raised and is treated as a teaching opportunity.

With teaching, you can only provide the words and ways to make information available. Once a participant become actively involved, the message becomes tailored, and more relevant to that participant's individual Recovery, but also demonstrates to the other people in the class that becoming active effects the way the Program is worked..

For the purpose of the class, this structure has evolved to provide an opening sequence to make particular questions non-threatening for the participants, so that, when the initial presentation is made, we can ask certain

questions without sounding like authorities or superiors.

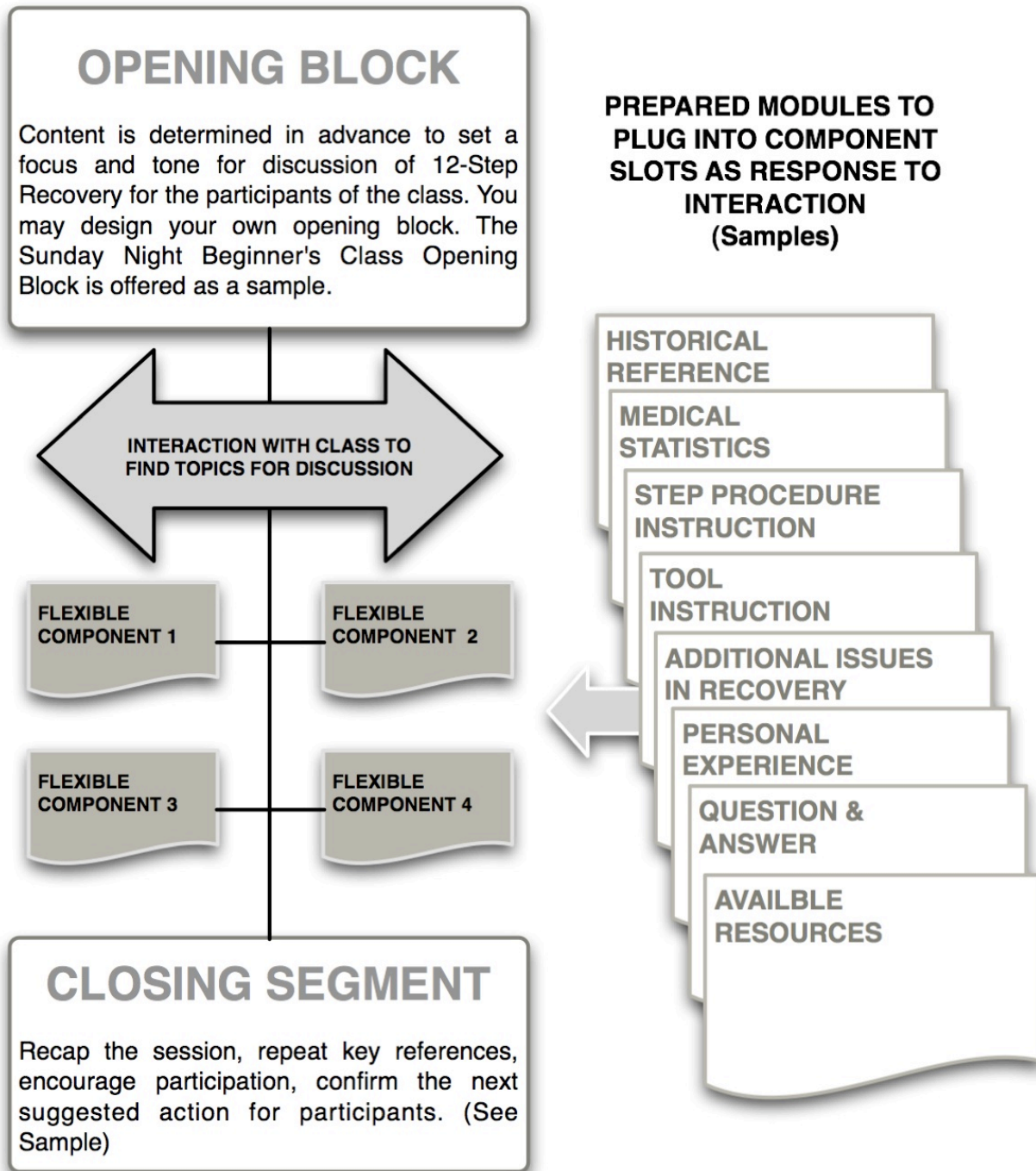
Remember that we are dealing with alcoholics either new to Recovery and discovering the 12-Step process for the first time, or we are dealing with someone who had previous experience with AA but are now coming off a relapse. They are on the defense and, if they have achieved the necessary “desperation of drowning men”, we can provide relief by allowing them to find some bit of hope in the answer to our questions.

## Structure

A structure for the Beginner's Class provides a great deal of flexibility. Framed with an Opening Block, a Closing Segment, and loaded with optional Modules, the class can serve to lead any discussion to the topic of Recovery and show how the participants can become active in their own Sobriety and Recovery.

This is a visual representation of the structure for the Beginner's Class.

## CLASS STRUCTURE



## The Opening Block

Sessions should begin with a set piece. This should be 10-20 minutes of introduction to Recovery, Steps, and the History of those topics. A sample opening block is provided in the next section, but as with all aspects of this beginner's class, you can tailor your message to the men and women who will be the participants of your class.

The approach during the Opening Block will set the tone for the session. If you set yourself as an authority, you stand a good chance of losing your audience. The goal is to "carry the message", as it says in Step Twelve.

Many people who try to carry the message do not realize that they have preconceptions of what the newcomer knows. I've learned to call these "hoops" the newcomer must jump through before the wise old-timer will grace them with the message.

You will hear "If they don't have a Sponsor, they're not serious." If they have never heard of Sponsorship, they won't have one, won't tell you they don't know what you are talking about, and become defensive. A teaching opportunity will be lost.

You will hear "If all the God talk runs them out, drugs and alcohol will run them back in." Drugs and alcohol will kill some of them before they make it back. You may be their only contact with Recovery before their last spree.

Remember your newcomer, even if they have prior time in sobriety, cannot be assumed to know any of the points you are presenting.

Carry the message to them, lay the set of spiritual tools at their feet, and let them decide if 12-Step Recovery is for them. Make

it clear it is their job to pick up the tools to succeed.

## Sample Opening Block

Since this class was developed as part of an institution, it is important that we clarify that 12-Step Recovery through AA (or NA) is not the same thing as their institution. The idea that the participants are the ones who will decide whether they are an alcoholic, need what we offer, or is in enough pain to begin, we are there to carry the message.

The opening for the class begins with this outline:

1. We open with the Serenity Prayer. It is a custom in meetings in this area and we try to respect local custom. If you do not want to say the prayer, we don't force anyone to do anything.
2. We introduce ourselves and invite the participants to introduce themselves. They are not required to say they are an alcoholic (or an addict) at this time – this is just a comfortable "hello." If someone doesn't want to give their name, let them listen.
3. We make a statement to define that this class is not part of the institution where we hold the class. It is not an "AA Meeting." This is a beginner's class based on material from Beginner's Classes dating back to the 1940s. This is a place where we intend to:
  - a) Introduce them to 12-Step Recovery, AA, the Big Book, and "The Program"<sup>5</sup>
  - b) We hope to explain why the Big Book is the only real authority

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<sup>5</sup> At this point, we usually insert the dictionary definition of "program" – a set of instructions to be followed in the order that they are written to achieve a goal."

in our Program; that the experiences of individual members are just that. Their individual story.

- c) We plan on “laying a set of spiritual tools” at their feet. They have control of whether they pick them up or not.
- d) We will give our definition of alcoholism to allow them to determine, for themselves, if they are an alcoholic (or addict) or not.

We emphasize the book and how our instructions come from that book, and how those instructions are carried out.

## Make Your Points

After your opening block, you can make your Points. At this point, we suggest you be clear on your role as representing one person in Recovery. When the class is conducted by three people or more, it presents a better view of how interaction is crucial to the success of the class engaging participants.

After we make points, we ask questions. These points are intended to define alcoholism by its physical, psychological, and spiritual responses to alcohol.

Focus your Opening Block to present information, not a direct confrontation with the participant about his or her acceptance of a personal diagnosis.

The points in the current class are as follows, but your class may choose to make other points the opening discussion.

### POINT #1

The normal reaction to alcohol is as a depressant. Non-alcoholics slow down after one drink, and if they have three they want to go to sleep. Our reaction is one leads to four

leads to eight and we become more active and feel freer to do what we want to do, regardless of the consequences.

That is the unnatural physical reaction to alcohol, which marks the physical aspect of alcoholism.

### POINT #2

When presented with the problems alcohol can create with their relationships, their health, their finances, and their reputation, the non-alcoholic stops drinking or sets reasonable boundaries that they are able to respect.

When we have problems with relationships, health, finances, reputation, or the law, we are still unable to stop drinking, or we set boundaries for our drinking that we must change constantly. Most of us report a mental obsession with the next drink, or fear of not being able to get the next drink.

This indicates the mental obsession and lack of control over our psychological response to alcohol is the abnormal psychological aspect of alcoholism.

### POINT #3

If you find that you have the disease of physical reaction and mental obsession of alcoholism, do you understand that alcoholism is no longer a question of moral failing or lack of will?

...

While Alcoholics Anonymous makes it clear that we have no monopoly on freedom from the physical addiction and mental obsession of alcoholism, the 12-Step Program that is the core of AA marks the first time we have had a system that, if followed as written in the book Alcoholics Anonymous, will work to deal with the results of separation from alcohol.

When alcohol is removed, the real problems that drive an alcoholic to the first drink,

surface and it is the purpose of Alcoholics Anonymous to find “a design for living that really works” in the face of the new awareness that comes with Sobriety.

Be careful not to jump ahead in the steps. The participants in your class will be wrestling with the first Three Steps, so keep your focus on those Steps.

When you have presented these opening points to the participants, try to explain some points that would be true of *any* alcoholic. Do not be surprised if some of your participants take any discussion of alcoholism as a personal attack. This is common in early Recovery.

## Some Questions to Identify the Need for Recovery

### QUESTION #1:

Does the background for an alcoholic sound like what you have experienced?

### QUESTION #2

When you need to stop, or decide to stop, do you find that you have little or no control over picking up a drink, or find that you drink more than you planned on drinking?

### QUESTION #3

Do you understand that the First Step does not create alcoholism? If you were behaving the way we have outlined, feeling the feelings we are discussing, and been unable to succeed with lasting Sobriety, that the First Step is a simple statement of what is already true?

### QUESTION #4

Do you understand that the physical reaction to alcohol is unnatural and beyond your control?

### QUESTION #5

Do you understand that your desire for more and more, once you have had a taste, is a

physical addiction that is beyond your power to control?

### QUESTION #6

With what we have discussed, the physical reaction being abnormal, the mental obsession being abnormal, do you feel that you are an alcoholic?

At this point, it may be appropriate to go around the room, as we did with introducing ourselves, to make a simple “yes” or “no” answer to Question #6.

If you have a way to get to the admission of the First Step that you feel is better, by all means, go with what you feel will make the best approach to the First Step.

## Interaction & Modules

Do not be surprised if some of the participants are unwilling to admit that they are alcoholics. “God will constantly disclose more to you and to us...” (*Page 164*). Take your cue from the positive of anyone admitting to their alcoholism and plunge forward into solutions to the problem to which they have just admitted.

Those who did not admit to the First Step will be listening while you move forward with the others. They may need more experience in the problem and the hopelessness of active alcoholism, but we cannot make those who are ready and who have taken their First Step wait.

Explain that more detail for the First Step can be found in the first 44 pages of the book, but for the moment we look at Step Two.

Take them to page 45:

*“Lack of power, that was our dilemma.”*

Or, you may want to take them to page 163:

*“We know what you are thinking. You are saying to yourself: ‘I’m jittery and alone. I couldn’t do that.’ But you can.*

*You forget that you have just now tapped a source of power much greater than yourself. To duplicate, with such backing, what we have accomplished is only a matter of willingness, patience, and labor."*

At this point you are in a good position to start interacting with the participants to see what topics are going to be most valuable in overcoming the newcomer's fears or objections to what is to come.

Remember, we are trying to get the participant to become part of their own recovery by engaging them in direct question and answers. The system works best when the questions and answers go both ways. Be open and willing to listen to their questions, too.

## **Engaging the Participants**

You can ask a few casual questions to find out what Step holds the most fear for them, what they are convinced they will never be able to do, or what other questions they may have about what comes next.

You can also invite them to ask whatever question is bothering them about AA, alcoholism, or their role in their own Recovery.

## **Contradiction**

The class is actually based on the Improvisational Technique, which is most

often used in improv comedy. The basis of this system is to always build on what was said. *Never contradict the comment or question.*

Improvisation is built on "Yes, and..." and never "No, but..." This means you can make comments that lead the conversation to a positive point based on a negative or completely erroneous statement.

Whenever possible, turn questions, even those that may seem non-productive, into a teaching opportunity. Take the question as the jumping off point for more information about the Program and Recovery.

When the participant sees that his or her comment has shaped the direction of the discussion, when their questions are not ridiculed, and when they are not made to look foolish for asking a question, they feel they have made a difference in the way the class proceeds. They become more invested in the process and lower their defenses.

This might allow a bit of Truth to slip through their defenses.

## **The Closing Segment**

You can design a closing segment to suit the needs and philosophy of your group.

## **The Class Outline (Summary)**

Opening Statement

A. Non Affiliation Statement

B. Choice to Participate

C. Opening Prayer (choice)

The Serenity prayer

Introduction

Opening Block

Engagement

Invitation to ask Questions

Conversion of Questions to Positive  
Discussion Points (Improvisation Technique)

Modules

Respond to each topic raised with:

Conversion to Positive talking point

Direct answer based on prepared modules; or

Admission that you do not have that answer  
handy, but that we can find someone who  
does.

Closing Segment

What is the participant's next action?

Hand-outs, if any, to take with them

Statement of Anti-Ego

"Nothing you heard tonight is from me. This  
is the result of XX years of listening and  
reading and prayer and working Steps with a  
Sponsor. I'm not that good - I've just had  
some great teachers."

Closing Prayer (Optional)